

Metropolitan Homelessness Commission Meeting

Friday, September 5, 2014
at the Sonny West Conference Center
700 2nd Avenue South

Present: Diane Kuhn, Brady Banks, Kirby Davis, Megan Barry, Burkley Allen, Mary Rolando, Dayna Lovelady, Steven Samra, Wendell Segroves, Phil Duke, J.C. Smith, Charles Strobel, Erik Cole, Marvin Cox, Ellen Zinkiewicz, Angie Hubbard, Angie Thompson

Staff: Will Connelly, Deon Trotter, Karri Simpson, Pam McEwen (MSS Finance Rep)

The meeting began at 9:36 a.m.

Minutes

The minutes of the July 18, 2014 Metro Homelessness Commission meeting were approved.

Financial Report and Budget

Pam McEwen reported that during the month of July, the finance department works diligently to close out all expenditures for the previous fiscal year; therefore, while money is spent in July it will not be posted and presented on until the August report. The Metro Homelessness Commission's annual budget of 1.4 million will remain the same in the upcoming fiscal year, which includes a new line item budget of \$11,200.00 to fund the four VISTAs that have been hired on. The fund for the VISTAs came from the previous line item "contributions to others;" How's Nashville funds are currently used to cover the expenses previously paid for under "contributions to others."

Project Homeless Connect continues to have \$14,5000 of funds available.

How's Nashville closed out the fiscal year with \$53,000.00 in the account; however, in the month of July \$66,000 in revenue was received, mostly through a \$50,000 donation from the Gail Kerr fund. After purchasing bus passes and NES certificates, as of July 31, 2014 there is approximately \$20,000 available for bus passes and \$22,000 for NES certificates.

During the month of July, \$3,000 in CDBG grant funds were spent and will be reimbursed by MDHA.

Director's Report

- **How's Nashville outcomes report:** Will Connelly reported that an average of 46 homeless individuals are being housed per month through the How's Nashville partnership; this data came from reports from the How's Nashville partners and HMIS. Of those who were housed in June and July 2013, 80% are still housed; the August retention report will be finalized shortly. Will Connelly also stated that the Homelessness Commission is currently working to streamline processes and this has started with Deon Trotter and Marshall Friskis-Warren (VISTA) looking at data for the current MDHA Section 8 collaboration, where up to 18 vouchers per month are received by applicants submitted through the homelessness commission. During the first three quarters of this collaboration, the average time from receiving the initial voucher until an RTA was submitted was between 80 and 100 days. In the fourth quarter, the time between initial voucher and RTA dropped to 50 days and now Deon and Marshall are currently analyzing the data to figure out why. Of those who received a Section 8 voucher, 82% were of higher acuity (3s and 4s determined by the VI-SPDAT assessment).

Will Connelly went on to discuss the coordinated assessment and entry, which was scheduled to be discussed later in the agenda. Currently the VISTAs are focused on streamlining the current continuum of services, so that the current maze is easier for individuals seeking services to navigate. Marshall Friskis-Warren and Molly Martin, two of the VISTAs, reported that under the CoC governance committee, a subcommittee was created to look at creating a coordinated entry system (CES). The VISTAs have conducted a plethora of research on what other cities are doing, a background on what can be done, and what Nashville would like to do. At the last subcommittee meeting they began to create an outline for what the CES would look like in Nashville. In October, the subcommittee will present this outline, along with a community tool kit that details the planning steps and provides resources. Erik Cole, a member of the CoC governance committee, stated they are prepared and need to have this conversation and are looking forward to the report in October.

Will Connelly stated that the Homelessness Commission is working to strengthen their data system, both within the CES and overall. This has been an ongoing goal since the implementation of How's Nashville. Since Nashville does not have an open and shared data system, some basic questions have been tough to answer; since implementing a common assessment tool, the VI-SPDAT used by several community organizations, we are now collecting similar data across programs. Of 716 individuals assessed, 516 met the definition for chronically homeless; in the last 6 months, those 516 individuals have accounted for 1,000 ambulance rides.

Will Connelly closed his outcomes report with the Latin phrase "Solvitur Ambulando," which means "it's solved by walking." How's Nashville was formed a little over one year ago following this ideal that you figure it out as you go, rather than spend so much time planning to plan to plan. This past Wednesday, the How's Nashville steering committee came together, with this philosophy in mind, to create new goals and get to work! More on this will be reported on in the coming meetings.

- **How's Nashville moving forward:** Will Connelly elaborated on the details regarding the recent meeting of the How's Nashville steering committee. This committee established goals after looking at five focus areas: Housing supply and matching; assessment and prioritization; Data, HMIS, and reporting; Support services; and coordinated outreach. As the committee works to create and take action steps to accomplish these goals, more will be reported on in future meetings.

Diane Kuhn asked what the housing placement numbers for August were. Will Connelly replied that they are currently finalizing those numbers and will send that report out soon. Based on the preliminary data, it appears that the August housing placements are in line with the average 46 for previous months. The federal government has established goals to end veteran homelessness by December 2015 and chronic homelessness by December 2016; based on How's Nashville's current data the number of housing placements per month must increase in order to meet the federal goal.

- **Ideas to Reality:** Will Connelly stated that this is program run through the Mayor's office that encourages Metro employees to submit innovative ideas that if chose will be explored further.

Last year, the idea for a collaboration between the SOAR and jail system was submitted and selected; this led to the creation and funding of the SOAR jail program that began in August. This year, Judy Tackett submitted an idea to focus on Metro General Hospital and the homeless individuals who are cycling through the system. The goal is to develop a program that will improve the identification of and connection to services for homeless at Metro General. The first meeting will be held on September 12 and will meet continually every week after for two to three months, at which point a presentation for a program will be made to the Mayor's office; funding to implement could follow.

- **Focus Groups:** Will Connelly stated that several small focus groups have been recently held, one for those who have been housed through How's Nashville and another for frontline staff including housing navigators, case managers, and community partner service providers. This is being done through a partnership through TSU and a grant from the Health Department was received to cover incidentals and incentives.
- **SOAR and attorneys working group:** Charles Strobel and Burkley Allen reported out that they met the day prior with Cayla Wilson, at Park Center, regarding the specifics of their program that led to the high success rate. Park Center has a 98% success rate with an average of 46 days, while the private sector is at a 33% success rate with a turnaround time averaging 100 days. Part of Park Center's success is that they conduct eligibility screenings on the front end, prior to going through the entire SOAR process and inevitably receiving a denial. According to Cayla Wilson, between 12-15 hours of work is required for each SOAR applicant; Charles Strobel and Burkley Allen expressed that this time commitment may be too much to ask of working attorneys and so they are also focused on other groups, including law students, to be trained to complete the SOAR process. No one has spoken with the Tennessee Bar Association yet however.

Diane Kuhn asked how individuals are being connected to the attorneys who are currently involved with SOAR and do we know how many this is? Charles Strobel stated that they do not currently know the demand for this issue and that another meeting has not yet been set. They stated they need attorney representatives to join this group and help them navigate this matter; Megan Barry volunteered. Diane Kuhn asked that they continue to report back on this at the upcoming Metro Homelessness Commission meetings.

- **City Accelerator:** Nashville has been selected 1 of 3 cities for the City Accelerator Award. The city will provide technical assistance from a think tank in Boston with a focus on implementing innovation for social services and assisting the low-income residents of Nashville. Judy Tackett is currently in Boston with Christine Milan for the initial meeting. Erik Cole stated that this is an opportunity to take the work How's Nashville has done and continue to innovate with a focus on poverty while putting dollars and assistance toward it. This is also an opportunity to gain resources regarding affordable housing.
- **Coordinated Assessment and Entry Planning:** *Will Connelly discussed this topic during the discussion on the How's Nashville outcome reports. Minutes regarding this topic can be found in this sub-heading above.*

Commissioner Discussion

Diane Kuhn stated that the Metro Homelessness Commission is now under a new ordinance and will continue until Metro government decides there is no longer a need. The Metro

Homelessness Commission is moving past the previous 10 year plan, and that more individuals were housed in the last year of that plan than all previous years combined, with How's Nashville in a very good place. Diane Kuhn would like to take this time for the commissioners to discuss what this board should be doing and what their goals are. She then read a mission statement, drafted by the staff at the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission, and stated she would like commissioner's input on this as well.

- **Draft Mission Statement:**

- Phil Duke stated he liked that the mission statement was succinct but densely written; he likes the way it reads.
- Marvin Cox asked what the 30-day path out of homelessness is. Will Connelly reread the second half of the mission statement and stated that the 30-day path is aspirations but if we are really going to talk about ending homelessness than we want to set a target that helps to determine what ending homelessness means. Will Connelly went on to say that not every experience of homelessness can be prevented but that the experience can be ended in 30 days. There are conversations happening around the country regarding what ending homelessness really means, centered on the federal goals, and so big aspirational goals for Nashville have been set. Marvin Cox added that right now the term "self-sufficiency" and "stability" are current buzzwords and asked if any conversation regarding this aspect has occurred. Will Connelly stated that yes, the experience of homelessness would be ended in 30-days but that support will continue beyond that timeframe so that individuals can become self-sufficient.
- Burkley Allen followed up to Marvin Cox's question by stating that a big success of How's Nashville is the follow-up.
- Angie Harman stated she thinks that changing the statement to a "30-day path toward housing stability" addresses all of the issues Marvin Cox brought up.
- JC Smith asked who supplies the retention and placement numbers reported out by How's Nashville? Will Connelly stated this information comes from the How's Nashville partner organizations. JC Smith went on to say that his contention is that this housing process has been done before; an individual is housed but then what happens to them? He said the data must be accurate because otherwise we can't know. Will Connelly stated that one of the goals that came out of the prior mentioned How's Nashville leadership retreat is improving data collection around housing retention so that it is more accurate, more transparent, and the process is streamlined. This is and has been an ongoing discussion.

- **Strategic Planning; Program Evaluation proposal; Feedback from Commissioner Survey:**

Diane Kuhn thought this was a good segue to discuss the Commissioner's survey responses. Almost half of the commissioners responded to the survey put out by the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission staff. A general consensus gathered from the survey is that the commissioners do not want to just hear read out reports but want to be more involved. One idea was to have smaller committees that focus on the contracts and ask the types of questions that are being brought up in today's meeting. This group would not need to meet more than 3 times per year, but these meeting could include visiting the contract sites and reporting back to the overall commission.

- Erik Cole offered to provide the CoC reporting and evaluating tools to assist with this.
- Mary Rolando thinks that the term "advocate" should be added to the mission statement; the change would be "...to create, implement, fund programs, and advocate for..."

- Steven Samra stated he thought the community partners needed to be specifically state in the mission statement, as well as include that those who currently are or are formerly homeless are involved.
- Both Wendell Segroves and Steven Samra stated they want to be on the contracts subcommittee.
- Diane Kuhn stated that nothing has to be decided today but that the focus should be to come up with ideas on what the commission should be doing.
- Megan Barry stated the mission statement clearly carves out four areas and then asked if there are structural pieces that support those? She stated that these committees could focus on those four pieces.
- Ellen Zinkiewicz stated that she does not disagree with the committee idea but thinks that because of the structure of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission that the committees should be topical and fluid rather than standing committees. She went on to say that the Commission is in a unique position to be the convener role that brings people together when needed. The process needs to start with what they have learned, who they are, what they do, and that can go into a more solution focused teams approach. The committees don't necessarily need to line-up with the four focus area, although it could, but that they need to be fluid so that focus can change when an issue arises.
- Megan Barry replied that she thinks the convening concept is interesting. She asked, how much of this commission is doing and how much of it is convening? And what then is the role for the commission and that role in the community working to end homelessness?
- Diane Kuhn then read some responses from the commissioner survey regarding what some of these roles may be. Responses included being a voice for the homeless, a forum to discuss topics, and to assist community partners. She then stated she thinks the commission has multiple roles.
- JC Smith think the committee idea is great become some commissioners are better at doing than convening. He then stated that he is better at doing.
- Angie Hubbard then brought up that currently there are two different bodies that are convened to address homelessness: the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission and the CoC. She asked if the commission should look at the collaboration or integration of these two very powerful group that both have funds to address homelessness.
- Diane Kuhn added that there are two pots of funds, federal and Metro, that address homelessness in Nashville. She states that Angie Harman's point is a very good one that maybe they should be talking about more.
- Erik Cole stated that a governance committee was created for the CoC in 2009 because there was recognition that a strategic vision was needed for the money being spent. Prior to that HUD allowed funded agencies to represent how these funds would be spent but this has evolved. It makes sense to unify, putting all of these processes together. The Governance Committee does have a different focus because they have funded agencies to evaluate and look at; he doesn't want to make huge changes that will undercut these organizations finances and needs but he does feel this is a welcome conversation that should be looked at. He went on to state that he sees the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission as a critical part of the community leadership that provides guidance on what the community priorities are, particularly in the current conversation regarding transitional housing vs. permanent supportive housing.
- Angie Hubbard added that she thinks that the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission needs to be briefed on what is occurring in the CoC and that if they aren't it will hurt the strategic planning focused on the overall goal of the Commission.
- JC Smith stated that he is very aware of what is happening with the CoC and is very involved in this process.

- Charles Strobel stated he thought that Angie Hubbard and Suzie Tolmie should be on the agenda for the next full Metropolitan Homelessness Commission meeting to discuss the CoC.
- Will Connelly stated that he is on the CoC Governance Committee and that he reports out on the activities of the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission at every meeting. He thinks it makes sense to have a parallel planning process and that having two different governing bodies doesn't make sense to him. In Washington, DC their 10 year plan just merged with their CoC. According to HUD regulations, the reason the CoCs exist are the same reason the Commission exists; Nashville could have one board instead of two. He informed the commissioners that he will send out information regarding the CoC prior to the next meeting.
- Erik Cole added that one of the things the CoC is currently looking closely at is the concept of a Unified Funding Agency (UFA). The idea behind the UFA is to have local control of the current HUD contracts and manage these designated funds actually in Nashville rather than at the federal level. The CoC has a year prior to the next UFA application deadline to consider this; currently only 2 UFAs have been approved nationwide. Of those two approved UFAs, both communities only have one governing group leading the focus on homelessness. Nashville as a community might not be mature enough yet to gain UFA status, but it could be. This is a great conversation to be had with all the players at the table.
- Charles Strobel stated that the Nashville Coalition for the Homeless also exists and has their own political voice.
- Diane Kuhn expressed that the topics currently being discussed are what needs to be the focus of future meetings, rather than reports being read. The CoC/Metropolitan Homelessness Commission alignment will be added to the agenda for future meetings. She also wants the commissioners to think more about possible working committees: things needing to be done and not things to talk about. So far the SOAR committee and Contracts committee have been discussed and if any commissioner is interested in serving on either, email Will Connelly.
- Angie Thompson stated she thinks "policy" needs to be added to the mission statement.
- Steven Samra wants to discuss the time limitations and physical locations in regards to the development of subcommittees. He thinks that now is the time to implement a virtual meeting platform so that more commissioners can be involved. Erik Cole agrees with this, however there is a state law that prohibits commissioners from calling into a meeting any time there is an action item on the agenda; these meetings must be an open forum for people to attend. Steven Samra would like to look at this further.
- Diane Kuhn thinks that there needs to be a strategic planning for this body; a very targeted frontline meeting focused on what the Commission wants to do. As they learn more about the CoC, it seems the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission should be a part of whatever strategic planning is going on; a relationship with the CoC should be formed.
- Megan Barry added that the Center for Nonprofit probably has resources focused on strategic planning.
- Will Connelly added that if the CoC is going to be included that it may be a good idea to have a facilitator who has a comprehensive knowledge of HUD regulations and we may want to look nationally for this person.
- Angie Hubbard stated she will actually be out of town for the next Metropolitan Homelessness Commission meeting and therefore Suzie Tolmie and Erik Cole will report out on the CoC.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Public Hearing

- Barry Hobbs: He has three points he would like to make today. The first is that an untypical day of being in this nightmare can consist of him at school, officially or unofficially, being chased by cops. At the end of the day, this problem of poverty has got to end in the country, this century, and all over the world. Second, the children, the ones in the colleges and on the streets, he is trying to bring them together at the library to form a movement in which they will end their own nightmares for the ones on the streets and be like the ones in the classrooms. No young person needs to be out on the streets; they have dreams. Third, on other group that needs to address this problem are the people at the Nashville Rescue Mission and on the streets. They need to quit complaining and get out there and fight. He has had to fight his whole life because he looks like Urkel [referring to Steve Urkel] and is clumsy. Come 2016 he plans to shake the hand of the next woman president; that woman can fight because she is from Chicago.
- Marvin Cox, commissioner, would like to say that out of respect he would appreciate if people will watch their language. He understands that people may be upset but he thinks that they can all talk as adults. This is a public building and children could be walking by; what kind of example are we setting [with that kind of language]?
- Evan McGuile: He wrote an article entitled “*Homeless Like Me.*” Every time a phone call is made to the emergency room and a reference is made that the individual looks homeless, out they [the police] come to ask more questions rather than realize this is a civil matter. Dedicate a homeless task force for the police, which is educated on the challenges faced by the homeless.
- Steve Ryder: He is a passionate advocate for the open meetings law. Any assembly where public issues are being addressed should be open to the public. A lot of discussion regarding the mission statement occurred here, but if you go down to the Mayor’s office no one is talking about the issue. The commission meets six times a year and isn’t getting anything done; you think you are, but you aren’t. The library is relooking at the public loitering law, which was removed years ago; this law will apply to the homeless. As the commission you are talking about your mission but you wouldn’t have to if your chairman was homeless because then you would know what is going on. The homeless see things from a different perspective than you and you don’t get it. He has nothing more to say to them after nine years of being here. The amount of response he has received in the last nine years is virtually nil, so his days coming here are going to come to an end. But before that happens, he hopes the commission will have a homeless chairman. No one downtown pays attention to this group and that is the commission’s fault. A homeless person is due to sit in that seat [referring to the current Chairman’s physical seat].
- John Zirker: He is an advocate for the Living Room and is now *formerly* homeless. He wants to piggy back on what Steve Ryder said. There needs to be a homeless engagement group and a leader who is going to bring it back [to the people]. He is formerly the leader of the Nashville power project which empowers homeless people to have a voice. They are willing to come to the table with the commission, where no one has probably ever been homeless. There are so many different issues but the voices are silenced out there because no one is really listening. It is always the same discussion at this meeting. How many homeless folks are sitting at this table? [Three individuals on the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission rose their hand] There is no new development for the homeless folks. Do you know what is going on out on the streets?
- Howard Allen: Things have been a little more compassionate here. He would love to see some doughnuts and juice here, as well as copies of the agenda. He helped organize this in the beginning so he is a failure. The 10 year plan is a failure. His mother said if he ever failed as a child, then she failed as a teacher. He lived when there was racial segregation and now homeless don’t even have a bathroom they can use. Go to NYC. When you put these people in housing

there needs to be rules and regulations. He watched politicians on this bench who moved up to a high political level, so the commission should have a conversation with those individuals to see if they can change anything. Modern day society created homelessness. It has been 10 years but nothing has been accomplished. The commission needs to talk with the homeless instead of talking about them. There is a lot of talking but not enough action. [At this point he was told his three minutes were up. He became very upset]. He stated he is homeless and the homeless should be given more time to speak. Like the ALS challenge, there should be a challenge for homelessness.

- Denis Huey: When the Hallmark Inn was shut down, was there a response from the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission to the Mayor, Metro government, or the Metro Police Department? Will Connelly responded that there was not a direct response, but the commission staff worked with community organizations to respond and provided tangible funds for move-in costs for those displaced. Denis Huey continued: But was there a written response expressing the disgust regarding how the process was handled and that those residents were only given an hour to vacate? The commission should public express to this to the Mayor and Chief Council so that when it happens again, they can't say that the commission never said anything was wrong with this type of situation was previously handled.
- Samuel Lester: He works with Open Table Nashville. He has not experienced homelessness but has been involved very heavily with the movement in the last year. He can see the commission has acted as an accelerator for both How's Nashville and the organizations in the last year; but we need to be aware of how the city itself is accelerating homelessness by criminalizing the actions of the homeless. Arresting individuals for sleeping on the streets, then each citation comes with court costs and if they aren't paid the individual ends up in jail. Insecurity, depression, and anxiety that come with this continued action make things worse. If you look at what has happened in East or North Nashville, police cruisers are pulling people over continuously. There is a serious degree to which the same populations in Ferguson are getting focused on here but that pales in comparison to what is happening to the homeless. This action is very destructive to their lives. Criminalization must be decreased.

The next and last full Commission meeting is on Friday, November 7th at the Sonny West Conference room.

The next Executive Committee meeting is on Tuesday, September 16 at 9:00 a.m. at Metro Social Services.

With no other comments, Diane Kuhn adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m.